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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 3 November 1997, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Dumitriu (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Romania)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Dumitriu (Romania), Vice-Chairman, took the chair.

Agenda item 85: International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space (A/52/20, A/52/307)

1. **The Chairman**, reading out a statement by Mr. Mapuranga (Zimbabwe), Chairman of the Committee, recalled that 1997 marked the fortieth anniversary of the successful launch of the Soviet satellite SPUTNIK I, the first man-made object launched into outer space, and 1999 would mark the thirtieth anniversary of the successful American Apollo landing on the moon. Achievements in outer space had inspired people around the world to reflect on the origin of the Earth or to contemplate human settlement in outer space. The world community had closely followed the United States Mars Pathfinder mission and the Russian Federation's Mir space station. Space exploration aroused the curiosity of people around the world and invited them to think of their past, present and future in the wider perspective of time and space. In addition to planetary exploration and manned missions, space was increasingly utilized for practical purposes in the areas of communications, weather forecasts and navigation. Applications of space science and technology had already become an essential part of daily life.

2. Recognizing that developments in outer space had opened new possibilities for the improvement of the life of mankind, the United Nations had made constant efforts to ensure that the exploration and use of outer space would be for peaceful purposes and for the benefit of all countries. The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and its subsidiary bodies had worked to establish the legal regime consisting of five international treaties and five sets of legal principles which governed space activities. In celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies of 10 October 1967, the international community recognized that the United Nations continued to play an important role in the rapidly expanding space activities within the changing international political and economic context.

3. Space science and technology applications should be not a luxury restricted to the wealthy countries, but essential tools for improving the socio-economic conditions of developing countries, particularly in the areas of disaster warning and prevention, land and ocean resources management, tele-education and tele-medicine. As space activities became increasingly commercialized and privatized, further efforts needed to be made to maximize the benefit to all countries. Given the changing political and economic environment surrounding space activities, the most effective and efficient ways for the United Nations to promote international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space needed to be found, and efforts to prevent the marginalization of countries with no space resources should be strengthened. The proposed third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III), a special session of the Committee open to all Member States of the United Nations, would be a major step in that direction. The Preparatory Committee had made much progress and now recommended that the Conference be held in Vienna from 19 to 30 July 1999.

4. In addition to preparing a strategy to enhance international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space into the next millennium through its preparatory work for UNISPACE III, the Committee had also reached consensus on new measures for the working methods of the Committee and its subsidiary bodies, including the composition and election of the bureaux, shortening the duration of sessions of those bodies and strengthening the agenda of the Legal Subcommittee. That was a most significant reform for any intergovernmental body within the United Nations system, and had taken only a year from the beginning of informal consultations. The Committee's success in overcoming political difficulties through a high level of cooperation and compromise should serve as a model for the challenge of reform of the Organization as a whole.

5. In the area of working methods, the Committee had also contributed to the Organization's cost-saving efforts by utilizing verbatim unedited transcripts in lieu of verbatim records of the Committee and summary records of the Legal Subcommittee. That innovative cost-saving measure had been noted with interest by the General Assembly, and the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences had invited all intergovernmental bodies entitled to written meeting records to consider the possibility of issuing unedited transcripts of one meeting for comparison purposes. The results of the Committee's evaluation of those transcripts would soon be reported by the Chairman of the Committee.

6. He congratulated the new officers of the Committee on their outstanding work at their first session, and expressed his confidence that COPUOS and its subsidiary bodies would continue to serve as the focal point for international cooperation in outer space and provide innovative ideas to respond to the needs of the world community in the changing international political and economic environment.

7. **Mr. Rao** (India), Chairman of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, said that the fortieth session of the Committee had marked the beginning of a new period in its history, as it had accomplished a fundamental reform in its method of work, involving politically complex issues such as the composition and election of bureaux, and overcome early differences of opinion thanks to a common commitment to strengthening the role and functions of the Committee in further promoting international cooperation in space exploration and exploitation in the current international political and economic environment, particularly that surrounding the United Nations.

8. The members of the Committee had shown tremendous cooperation to reach early agreement on the politically complex aspects of the reform. The principle of consensus had once again proved to be the most essential element in the work of the Committee. Having accomplished such fundamental reform, the Committee enjoyed an even higher degree of confidence and trust among its member States, enabling it to build upon past achievements and to achieve the dream of realizing a truly global village where all nations would benefit from developments in space activities. That positive atmosphere had contributed to the constructive discussions on some of the major issues before the Committee, particularly relating to the holding of UNISPACE III, and significant progress had been made in preparations for that Conference.

9. As in previous years, the report of the Committee (A/52/20) covered ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes, the report of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee (A/AC.105/672), the report of the Legal Subcommittee (A/AC.105/674), implementation of the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE 82), preparations by the Preparatory Committee for UNISPACE III, and the spin-off benefits of space technology. The Committee had examined the report of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and the implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE 82 together, especially the issues of the United Nations Programme on Space Applications, coordination of space activities within the United Nations system, remote sensing of the earth by satellites, the use of nuclear power sources in outer space, and space debris.

10. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 51/123, the Working Group of the Whole to evaluate the implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE 82 had identified some priority areas where further efforts should be made to promote the applications of space science and technology for development. One such area related to stimulation and support of the growth of local nuclei in developing countries: in that context, the Committee noted that significant progress had been achieved in establishing regional centres for space science and technology education. At the Centre for Space Science and Technology Education in Asia and the Pacific, the second education programme had started in January 1997, and the centres in Africa and in Latin America and in the Caribbean were expected to become operational by 1998. Another priority was the resources required to implement the United Nations Programme on Space Applications. The limited availability of resources for the programme continued to be a major concern for the Committee, particularly in developing countries. Considering that voluntary contributions covered two thirds of the cost of the Programme's activities, and that the Committee had decided that regional preparatory meetings for UNISPACE III should be organized within the framework of the Programme, he urged Member States and international organizations to make cash or in-kind contributions to support the Programme.

11. At its 1997 session, the Working Group had shifted the focus of its work to preparation for UNISPACE III. Its recommendations were contained in the report of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, and had been endorsed by the Committee, which had recommended that the Working Group be reconvened in 1998.

12. With regard to the issue of the use of nuclear power sources in outer space, the Cassini spacecraft of the United States and the Mars 96 spacecraft of the Russian Federation had been discussed, since both spacecraft carried nuclear power sources. The United States, in accordance with the principles relevant to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 47/68, had informed the Secretary-General in document A/AC.105/677 how States might obtain the results of the environmental assessment concerning that spacecraft. The Russian Federation had provided detailed information on all aspects of the construction and flight of Mars 96, especially the safety provisions concerning the nuclear power source. The Subcommittee had reconvened its Working Group on the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space, and its report also contained the recommendations made by the Working Group. The Committee had recommended that the Working Group be reconvened in 1998.

13. The Committee noted with satisfaction the progress made by the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee under its multi-year work plan adopted in 1995 to address specific topics relating to space debris during the period 1996-1998. In 1997 the Subcommittee had concentrated on modelling the space debris environment and on risk assessment,

making further progress in preparing its technical report on space debris; in 1998 it would concentrate on space debris reduction measures. The Committee had agreed with the Subcommittee that changes to the technical report could be made at the following year's session and that the report on space debris would be finalized in 1999.

14. The Subcommittee had also considered its special theme for 1997, "Space systems for direct broadcasting and global information systems for space research". He thanked the Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) and the International Astronautical Federation (IAF) for their support and for sponsoring and organizing a symposium on that theme during the Subcommittee's session. The Committee agreed with the Subcommittee that the theme for the 1998 session should be "scientific and technical aspects and applications of space-based meteorology", to be considered in the context of UNISPACE III, and that COSPAR and IAF, in liaison with Member States, should be invited to arrange a symposium to complement discussions on that theme.

15. The Legal Subcommittee, through its Working Group on agenda item 4, had considered matters relating to the definition and delimitation of outer space and the character and utilization of the geostationary orbit. The German proposal (A/AC.105/C.2/L.207 and Rev.2), containing a future programme of work and draft resolution entitled "Request to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU): ensuring equitable access to the geostationary satellite orbit", had been withdrawn after intensive discussions. At its 1998 session, discussions of the geostationary orbit would be based on the working paper submitted by Colombia (A/AC.105/C.2/L.200 and Corr.1) at the 1996 session and the analysis conducted by the secretariat on the compatibility of the approach indicated therein with the existing rules and procedures of ITU relating to the use of the geostationary orbit.

16. The Legal Subcommittee agreed to include in the Subcommittee's agenda the item submitted by Mexico entitled "Review of the status of the five international legal instruments governing outer space" (A/AC.105/C.2/L.206/Rev.1). The work plan contained in the same document would also be implemented.

17. He was grateful to the International Institute of Space Law (IISL) and the European Centre for Space Law (ECSL) for organizing a symposium "Celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the Outer Space Treaty". The Committee agreed that IISL and ECSL should again be invited to hold a symposium on space law at its 1998 session.

18. The Committee recommended that UNISPACE III should be convened at the United Nations Office at Vienna, from 19 to 30 July 1999 as a special session of the Committee, open to all States Members of the United Nations. The Committee made a number of recommendations, including the preparation of a draft report of UNISPACE III and background papers, organizational and regional preparatory meetings, participation of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations as well as private industry, and financial aspects of the UNISPACE III Conference.

19. The Conference would be held to sustain the momentum for international cooperation in outer space in the post-cold-war period while keeping financial costs within existing resources. In 1999, meetings would be shortened or eliminated so that the savings could be utilized for UNISPACE III. The Committee agreed that the level of conference-servicing resources available to the Committee and its subsidiary bodies for the biennium 1998-1999 should remain at the same level as for the current biennium in order to serve the UNISPACE III Conference. The Conference would strive to strengthen partnership between Governments and space agencies and the private sector to further enhance international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. All Member States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations with space activities were encouraged to support the preparatory work for the UNISPACE III Conference.

20. The Committee had contributed to the cost-saving efforts of the organization by pioneering the use of unedited verbatim transcripts in lieu of verbatim records of the Committee and summary records of its Legal Subcommittee. In addition to the savings in the preparation of records of meetings, the unedited verbatim transcripts could be prepared and released more quickly, and reflected the deliberations more accurately than the verbatim records. The Committee had therefore agreed to recommend to the General Assembly the continued use of those transcripts.

21. In spite of the spectacular advances in science and technology, poverty, particularly in the developing countries, continued to increase unabated. The great challenge to humanity in the coming decade would be to balance development and concerns for the preservation of ecological sustainability. Space technology and its applications could be an effective tool for environmental monitoring and resource management, plus contributing to the promotion of sustainable development society.

22. **Ms. Backes** (Luxembourg), speaking on behalf of the European Union and Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia,

Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the associated country Cyprus, as well as Iceland and Norway, welcomed the adoption of the Chairman's package proposal relating to new working methods of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, which reflected the contemporary needs of the Committee and the environment. She thanked the outgoing Chairman of the Committee, Ambassador Peter Hohenfellner of Austria, for his tireless efforts to bring about the reform package. She also congratulated the newly elected members of the bureaux and welcomed the appropriate balance in the distribution of offices.

23. The new composition of the bureaux, the adapted structures of the agenda, and the reduction of the duration of the sessions from seven to five and a half weeks, combined with the continued use of unedited verbatim transcripts, would allow for a substantial and desirable reduction of administrative costs, and thus set a positive example for the work of the United Nations.

24. The Committee had mandated the Office for Outer Space Affairs, to implement the Programme on Space Applications to promote awareness of advanced technologies and development of new systems in developing countries. Numerable studies and symposia had enhanced cooperation and exchange, and had contributed to increased access to space benefits by all countries.

25. At its 1990 session, the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee would conclude the multi-year work plan on topics related to space debris. She hoped the discussions in the Subcommittee would lead to the adoption of concrete measures to prevent the proliferation of space debris and to minimize the hazards posed by it.

26. The Legal Subcommittee had made efforts to review the items on its agenda, in particular the adoption of the "Review of the status of the five international legal instruments governing outer space". It was however regrettable that no consensus decision had been reached on a working paper requesting the International Telecommunication Union and its member States to ensure equitable access to geostationary satellites and to radio frequency spectrum resources.

27. She welcomed the efforts made to limit the cost of the UNISPACE III Conference in accordance with the provisions of document A/52/20. She particularly welcomed the provisional agenda's emphasis on the possible contributions of space research to the solution of major problems of modern society and the participation of the private sector, and the proposal of the Advisory Committee that Member States, international organizations and the private sector should make voluntary contributions in cash or in kind. The Conference should disseminate the situation of science and space technology and their contribution to sustainable development.

The meeting rose at 3.50 p.m.